

Written Testimony of
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Management of Red Snapper in the Gulf of Mexico
Before
The United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy, and Environment,
Washington D.C.
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Good afternoon. Thank you Chairman Farenthold and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding the Management of Red Snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. **I am Jamie Miller, the Executive Director at the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR).** My agency's mission is to enhance, protect and conserve the marine interests of Mississippi. One of the ways we do this is by providing a fisheries regulatory environment that is understandable and enforceable while allowing sustainable access to these resources. Today I am here to speak to you about the Red Snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico, specifically off the coast of Mississippi.

Red Snapper Management in Mississippi

Mississippi, like the other Gulf states has a long history with the Red Snapper fishery. Our state has representation of all user groups. The commercial group operates through the Individual Fisheries Quota (IFQ) system. The recreational group, through the recent passage of Amendment 40, is separated into two sectors, identified as the private sector and the charter/for-hire sector.

Currently, Red Snapper is managed as a single stock under a Gulf-wide quota system. The Gulf-wide quota is divided between two recreational sector(s), with 51 percent of the quota and the commercial sector, with 49 percent of the quota. There are issues within each group, but the largest management issue with Red Snapper presently is within the recreational sector(s).

Over the past decade, the recreational private sector has seen annual seasons reduced from 194 days in 2007 to just 11 days in 2016. These conditions created by the current management system have led to derby seasons, which have frustrated the private anglers and forced them to fish offshore in less favorable and sometimes dangerous conditions. These derby seasons also have decreased the ability of NOAA's data collection tool, the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) to accurately determine harvest levels. There are also serious questions about the timing and accuracy of stock assessment updates. As a result, our agency, as well as the public, has lost confidence in the data being used to determine season lengths.

Tails N Scales and Data Collection

In response to the data collection problem, Mississippi created its own survey system called **Tails n' Scales**, a custom landings program for Red Snapper administered by the MDMR. This program has been paid for without federal funds and is unique from other programs in that the angler must acquire a trip number before leaving the dock and be in possession of the number while on the water. By making this requirement mandatory, Mississippi fishery management data is reported and verified quickly, as well as being hyper-accurate. These data can now be used in determining catch targets for the recreational sector in a matter of days rather than in the six to 10 months according to the current system.

The other Gulf states have developed similar landings programs to provide “custom” area fishery dependent data, which can be utilized in Gulf-wide or region-wide assessments to ensure that overfishing is not occurring. Many of these state-based landings programs (including ours) are currently being certified by NOAA.

Timely and Updated Stock Assessments

Additionally, I and other members of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council have requested NOAA to provide more timely and accurate updates to stock assessments for Red Snapper. Unfortunately, this issue remains unchanged and will continue to leave a gap in data that will keep us in a pattern of derby seasons.

Moving Forward with Magnuson-Stevens Act

We remain at a crucial point in the management of this species, and I would like to emphasize that the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act does a good job overall of keeping America's fisheries sustainable. However, when a species has been placed in a rebuilding plan, it remains trapped there until a substantial effort is made to collect timely and accurate data to show it has recovered. The states have been forced to provide the collection of these data to NOAA at their own expense. I believe NOAA must find ways to focus additional resources on solving issues that Gulf states have identified as high priority. The state of Mississippi remains committed to federal partnerships that work to ensure sustainable harvest benefiting this public resource.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing. The management of Red Snapper is important to the citizens of Mississippi and Mississippi's coastal economy. I am glad to answer any questions members of the subcommittee may have at this time.